

Emotional labour and work performance

Abstract

The last two decades of the twentieth century has witnessed a major global shift in the distribution of employment away from agriculture and industry into the service sector. With the rise of the service sector, increasing number of employees are involved in direct interaction with the client and in these occupations, expression of appropriate emotions during the interaction is a job requirement, implicitly or explicitly. Concomitant with this transition a relatively new labour market has been created which is characterized by work roles that emphasize interactions between front-line service workers and customers. Many customer service workers have to regulate their emotions on the job to be able to appear professional even when dealing with negative issues or rude customers. This new type of labour which has emerged from the work demand is termed as 'Emotional labour'. Emotional labour is not confined to customer service workers, it can be challenging for most of us, because it is difficult to conceal true emotions and to display the emotions required in work place. Emotional labour is an Employee's expression of organizationally desired emotions during interpersonal transactions at work. Arlie Hochschild (1983) was the first sociologist to explicitly identify the management and display of emotions as part of the work role. She defined emotional labour as the "management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display". Hochschild asserted that emotional labour is a stressor that is detrimental to the psychological and physical well-being of employees. Her findings suggested that the need to manage emotions in the service of organizational display rules can create a discrepancy between the emotions an employee feels and the emotions he or she displays when serving a customer. This discrepancy between required and true emotions is referred to as 'Emotional dissonance'. The larger the conflict between the required and true emotions, the more employees tends to experience stress, job burnout, and psychological separation from self. Hochschild posited two different avenues that people may use to reduce emotional dissonance: surface acting (outward behavior) and deep acting (inner feelings). The emotional state of employees is directly related to work performance. Therefore, management of factors causing emotional labor is an important aspect in work environment.

Key words: Emotions, Emotional labour, Emotional dissonance, Job performance

1. Introduction

Emotions have a profound effect on almost everything we do in daily life. It is generally assumed that a person's thoughts and actions are governed primarily by conscious reasoning called cognition. But, neuroscience discoveries have revealed that our perceptions, decisions, and behaviour are influenced by both cognition and emotion, and that the latter often has the greater influence. Emotions are physiological, behavioural, and psychological episodes experienced toward an object, person, or event that create a state of readiness. There are four key elements of this definition. First, emotions are brief events or episodes. For instance, irritation with a customer is for short period and would typically subside within a few minutes. Second, emotions are directed toward someone or something. We experience joy, fear, anger, and other emotional episodes toward tasks, customers, or a software program we are using, and so on. Third, emotions are experiences. They represent changes in a person's physiological conditions, such as blood pressure, heart rate, and perspiration, as well as changes in behaviour, such as facial expression, voice tone, and eye movement. These emotional reactions are involuntary and often occur without our awareness. When aware of these responses, we also develop feelings (worry, fear, boredom) that further mark the emotional experience. The experience of emotion also relates to the fourth element, i.e. emotions put people in a state of readiness. When we get worried, for example, our heart rate and blood pressure increase to make our body better prepared to engage in fight or flight. Emotions are also communications to our conscious selves. Some emotions (e.g., anger, fear) are particularly strong 'triggers' that interrupt our thought, demand our attention, and generate the motivation to take action. They make us aware of events that may affect our survival and well-being.

Emotions operate automatically and unconsciously most of the time, but research says that the logical reasoning process actually works on the person's emotions and uses it while translating beliefs into feelings. Suppose, in thinking about whether the announced change in organizational structure is good or bad, we try to sense our emotional reactions to the event, then use this emotional awareness as factual information in our logical evaluation. We can see how emotions affect workplace attitudes. When performing our jobs or interacting with co-workers, we experience a variety of emotions that shape our longer term feelings toward the organization/institution, our colleagues, the job itself, and so on. A major global shift has

occurred in the distribution of employment which is away from agriculture and industry into the service sector (Godbout, 1993). With the rise of the service sector, increasing number of employees are involved in face to face and voice to voice interaction with the client and in these occupations, expression of appropriate emotions during the interaction is a job requirement, implicitly or explicitly (Igo and Totterdell, 2007; Zapf, 2002). Concomitant with this transition a relatively new labour market has been created which is characterized by work roles that emphasize interactions between front-line service workers and customers. Many customer service workers have to regulate their emotions on the job to be able to appear professional even when dealing with negative issues or rude customers. This new type of labour which has emerged from the work demand is termed as 'Emotional labour'. Arlie Hochschild (1983) was the first sociologist to explicitly identify the management and display of emotions as part of the work role. She defined emotional labour as the "management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display".

Emotional labour is not confined to customer service workers, it can be challenging for most of us, because it is difficult to conceal true emotions and to display the emotions required by the job. The main problem is that joy, sadness, worry and other emotions automatically activate a complex set of facial muscles that are difficult to prevent, and equally difficult to fake. Our true emotions tend to reveal themselves as subtle gestures, usually without our awareness. Meanwhile, pretending to be cheerful or concerned is difficult because several specific facial muscles and body positions must be coordinated.

2. Theoretical background - Affective Events Theory (AET) model

Affective Events Theory (AET) is a psychological model designed to explain the connection between emotions and feelings in the workplace and job performance, job satisfaction and behaviours. The underling belief of AET is that human beings are emotional and that their behaviour is guided by emotion.

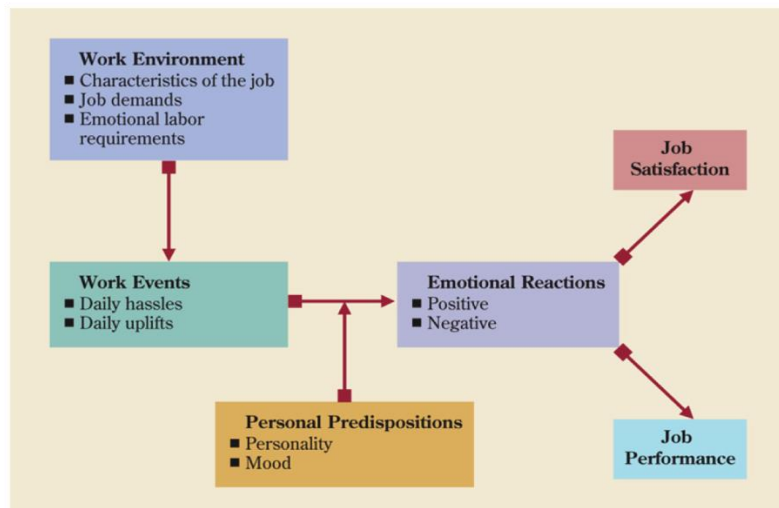


Figure 1: Affective Events Theory (Source: David Steare, Pinterest)

The model explains the linkages between internal influences (e.g., cognitions, emotions, mental states) of employees and their reactions to incidents that occur in their work environment which affect their performance, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction. The theory proposes that affective work behaviors are explained by mood and emotions of employee, while cognitive-based behaviors are the best predictors of job satisfaction. Also the theory suggests that positive-inducing (e.g., uplifts) as well as negative-inducing (e.g., hassles) emotional incidents at work are distinguishable and have a significant psychological impact upon workers' job satisfaction. This result in lasting internal and external affective reactions exhibited through job performance, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment.

3. Antecedents of Emotional Labour:

Studies have shown that many factors affect emotional labour. The factors may be individualistic characteristic, job characteristics or organizational characteristics.

3.1. Individual characteristics

The variables related to individual characteristics are:

- Emotional contagion,
- Empathic concern
- Job emotion

Emotional contagion is the tendency for two individuals to emotionally converge. People with emotional contagion easily empathize with others emotionally because they express

their emotion easily, but feel stressed quickly when they suppress their emotion. Thus, emotional contagion can positively affect emotional labour (Kruml & Geddes, 2000). Chu (2002) found that emotional contagion has a significant effect on the deep acting of employees. In contrast, Choi et al. (2015) revealed that emotional contagion affects surface acting.

Empathic concern refers to individuals' self-centred acceptance of and response to other's emotion. Employees with high empathic concern are not irritated by customers and only have a feeling about the customers, but do not feel the same way as the customers (Davis, 1994). Choi et al. (2015) found that empathic concern affects deep acting.

Job emotion is the degree to which employees express their emotion during job performance and refers to the empathy occurring while performing their job. If employees empathize more while performing their job, it is more likely that they express their emotion. As a result, they are more likely to perceive the difference between the emotions they feel and the emotional display rule required by the organization. The findings of the study of Winkler et al., (2024) contribute to the understanding of the health impairing effects of emotion work.

3.2. Job characteristics

Hackman & Oldham (1975) defined the following five core job characteristics: skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy and feedback.

Table 1: Description of job characteristics suggested by Hackman & Oldham (1975)

Job characteristics	Description
Skill variety	Refers to whether a job requires a variety of activities, such as functions, talents, knowledge and skills. As the skill variety of employee's increases, the diversity of their emotional display also increases.
Task identity	Refers to the degree to which a job requires completion of a whole job or a part of the whole job. Organizational members think their jobs more meaningful when they can perform their job as a complete unit, rather than being responsible for some part of the job.
Task significance	Refers to the degree to which the job performed by individuals has a significant impact on the lives and works of other people both inside the organization and outside the organization. The individuals find their tasks meaningful when their tasks have an actual impact on the physical and psychological situation of others.

Autonomy	Refers to the degree to which the job provides freedom, independence, and discretionary authority to individuals while performing task. A job with higher autonomy has the corresponding level of reasonability (Hackman & Lawler, 1975).
Feedback	Refers to the degree to which a clear information on how effective the job performed by an individual is provided to the individual. Feedback is the degree to which individuals clearly know the outcomes of their job in a direct and indirect manner.

Morris & Feldman (1996) suggested that job autonomy reduces emotional dissonance and Wharton (1993) found that job autonomy decreases the emotional labour of employees. Emotional dissonance influences both daily Subjective Well Being and turnover intention; moreover, job autonomy reduces negative influence of emotional dissonance (Shi, et al., 2021).

3.3.Organizational characteristics

The organizational characteristics, as the antecedents of emotional labour, include:

- Organizational support system
- Social support
- Performance pressure
- Job satisfaction

Thomas & Ganster (1995) suggested that the organizational support system creates an environment where a more predictable job environment is provided and co-workers can give helps each other, reducing the stress of the members. In a study, job satisfaction and burnout were found to mediate the relationship between emotional labor and work performance, further it was found that supervisory support moderated the relationships between emotional labor and job satisfaction and burnout (Chen, et al., 2012). Job pressure and perceived lack of organizational support were positively associated with posttraumatic stress (Birze, et al., 2022).

Social support consists of support from supervisors, support from co-workers and support from family members, and refers to all positive supports that individuals can obtain from their interpersonal relationship. Schneider & Bowen (1985) reported that social support reduces the surface acting of emotional labour and supports from co-workers or supervisors create positive working conditions. The perception of employees that they are working in a supportive environment is associated with low stress and turnover intention and high job

satisfaction and team work performance (Cropanzano et al, 1997; Eisenberger, Cummings, Armeli & Lynch, 1997; Howes, et al., 2000). Survey data collected in a study by De Clercq, et al., (2023) among employees across various industries, showed that experienced discrepancies between felt and organizationally desired emotions curtail employees' voluntary efforts to improve the organizational status quo because they develop a belief that their organization does not value them.

4. Emotional dissonance

Hochschild was not only the first scholar to explicitly identify the management and display of emotions as part of the work role, but she also asserted that emotional labour is a stressor that is detrimental to the psychological and physical well-being of employees. Specifically, her findings suggested that the need to manage emotions in the service of organizational display rules can create a discrepancy between the emotions an employee feels and the emotions he or she displays when serving a customer. This discrepancy, referred to as emotional dissonance - the conflict between required and true emotions. Emotional dissonance refers to the structural discrepancy between felt emotions on the one hand and the emotional display that is required and appropriate in the working context (Zapf et al., 1999, 2002). Thus, emotional dissonance is the discrepancy between authentic and displayed emotions as demanded by the job (Zapf, 2021).

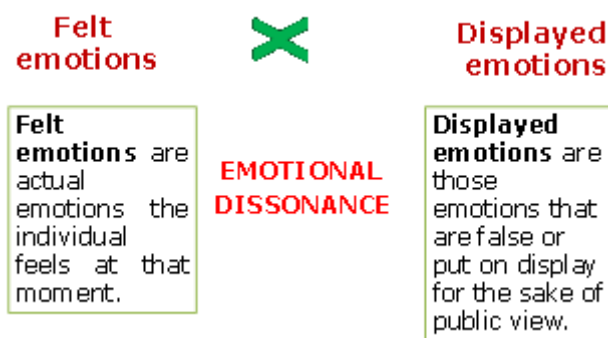


Figure 2: Emotional dissonance

Hochschild posited two different avenues that people may use to reduce emotive dissonance - Surface acting & Deep acting. Surface acting focuses on outward behaviour and the actor is not actually experiencing the displayed emotion, he or she is simply portraying the emotion for the audience to see and interpret. Deep acting, on the other hand, focuses on inner feelings and refers to attempts to internalize the required emotion so that the natural,

unaffected display will be congruent with the role requirement. Studies showed that Surface acting results in negative emotional labor such as depersonalization, emotional exhaustion, or dissatisfaction and Deep acting results in positive emotional labor such as sincerity or a sense of fulfillment (Grandey, 2003). Further, surface acting and deep acting are, respectively, negatively and positively related to creativity (Hill, et al., 2020). That is, because while Deep acting is not only to create externally expressed emotion but to change even internal emotion in the direction of the emotional expression principle, Surface acting is only to make the visual emotional aspect correspond to the organizational emotional expression principle (Hochschild, 1983).

5. Management of emotions at work place

Many factors may contribute to the occurrence of Emotional labor at work place. The management of factors causing emotional labor is an important aspect of work places, particularly in service sector. Some of these factors are discussed below:

5.1. Dimensions of emotion work: frequency, variety, attentiveness and intensity

Dimensions of emotion work itself: frequency, attentiveness and duration, variety and intensity also influence the outcome of emotion work (Morris and Feldman, 1996). The type of service occupation plays a crucial role in predicting effects on employee well-being, positive emotion requirements were found consistently and positively linked to personal accomplishment (Kem & Zapf, 2021).

5.2. Self selection

Certain group of people may self select into jobs requiring emotion management and that they may be more likely to enjoy and seek emotion work, and experience the positive consequences of emotion management. On the other hand, employees who did not self select to the profession requiring emotion work, perceive the control of emotional labour to be external (by organizations or by customers), and are more likely to experience emotional dissonance and hence burnout, due to emotion work.

5.3. Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence, consisting of the components of self awareness, self-regulation, motivation, social skills and empathy (Goleman, 2003), is an important factor that may

influence the self concept of the individual, hence the occupation choice; the effort involved in emotion work and the perception of emotion work as positive or negative impact (McQueen, 2004). Success is largely determined by the ability to overcome various life problems, and this ability has little to do with Intellectual Intelligence (IQ), but is related to Emotional Intelligence (EQ) (Uraz & Arhan, 2020).

5.4. Organizational commitment

Organizational commitment is the individual's psychological attachment to the organization. Organizational commitment may be the basis behind how workers feel about their jobs, so that these workers would become more committed to their organizations. Studies suggest that there exist significant relationships between emotional labor levels and organizational commitment (Deliveli & Kiral, 2020; Akin, 2021). The study of Sezen-Gultekin et al., (2021) on Mediating role of Organizational Commitment (OC) on the relationship between Emotional Labor (EL) and Work Engagement (WE) of Teachers provided evidence that OC of teachers can mediate the relationship between their EL and WE.

5.5. Perceived job Autonomy

Erickson (1991) found that autonomy in the job tends to mitigate the harmful effects of emotional labor. Importance of autonomy was also highlighted by Lopez (2006), who noted that when the nursing home provided more autonomy to their health care providers, the employees perceived emotion work positively.

5.6. Social support

Another factor that mitigates the harmful effects of emotion labour is social support (Zapf, 2002, 2021). Montgomery et al., (2006) also established that work life balance moderated the relation between emotional labour and burnout. Research findings indicate the mediating role of emotional labor in social support and well-being (Kwon & Yoon, 2011; Wu et al., 2020)

5.7. Job satisfaction

Employees who feel positive about work have less emotional dissonance. This is because their natural feelings are typically in line with the expressions normally demanded by the frontline works. Research suggests that those with high job satisfaction perceive higher

person-job attachment and are likely to have positive moods and emotions while at work (Fisher, 2010).

5.8. Individual factors

Individual factors like personality also presumably play a crucial role in choice of professions that entail emotion work (Zapf, 2002; Zapf,2021).

- Better physical health
- Appropriate stress coping strategies
- Lower neuroticism
- Higher extraversion
- Positive self-concept
- Lower workaholic

6. Conclusion

Emotions play an important part in how employees function during the work day. Emotional labour and emotional dissonance reflect how challenging it can be for employees to maintain a helpful, caring attitude when inside, they may be dealing with negative personal or work issues. Emotional labour and emotional dissonance affect how an employee performs at work. Emotional labour is an indicator of how employees can handle adversity at work if they let their emotions hurt their work. Emotional dissonance occurs when employees are not able to control their emotions. Their real emotions become an obstacle to job performance.

Managers can identify workers who are having emotional dissonance and provide an outlet and training to help them deal with personal issues. This way, the employee will be able to perform on the job positively by solving personal issues.

7. Future researchable areas in Emotional Labour (EL)

- i. Research studies are concentrated in the affects of EL but very less work has been conducted on 'how to resolve EL'.
- ii. Research on quantitative analysis of EL permissible for different job types can be done.
- iii. Studies on gender differences in EL may be undertaken.

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